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Sen. Allen says Legislature has to examine further MDOT's moves on the Mackinac Bridge Authority

ST. IGNACE – Conflicting statements from the governor's administration regarding the takeover of Mackinac Bridge Authority duties by the Michigan Department of Transportation require more oversight from the Legislature about what the department intends, said Sen. Jason Allen, R-Traverse City.

Allen held a town-hall meeting Thursday in St. Ignace attended by about 100 local residents, state lawmakers and MDOT Director Gloria Jeff.

"While I appreciated Director Jeff coming to St. Ignace, I am more concerned than ever," Allen said. "Department leaders and the governor say the actions of MDOT aren't a Lansing power grab, however, the director stated that the state is taking over the investment, insurance and maintenance functions from the authority."

During the town-hall meeting, Jeff said the board has already been stripped of its authority over maintenance, insurance and investment — leaving just setting tolls and event planning such as allowing fireworks displays or camera crews to film from the bridge as the only remaining functions of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. Members of the bridge authority said that they needed detailed information about the bridge's condition and related details before they could determine whether toll rate changes were needed.

"The governor says she doesn't want a Lansing takeover, and I expect her to keep her word," Allen said. "It's my intention to fully explore all options, legal and legislative, to restore the power of the bridge authority. This may require legislative correction."

During the meeting, Jeff gave a presentation that noted how independent engineers called the bridge "well-maintained and in good condition."

Other lawmakers in attendance were Sen. Mike Prusi, D- Ishpeming, and Reps. Tom Casperson, R-Escanaba, Kevin Elsenheimer, R-Bellaire, and Gary McDowell, D-Rudyard. Most members of the bridge authority also attended the meeting.

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